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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Middle East - Hamas - Kidnapped  
Soldier Afghanistan  
PARIS - Wednesday, June 28, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Middle East - Hamas - Kidnapped Soldier  
Afghanistan

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Although France's World Cup victory over Spain is today's top story, the situation in the Middle East is today's lead international story. For Liberation "Hamas Is Torn Between War and Peace" in the draft document it signed on "national entente", "which implicitly recognizes Israel." An analysis by Christophe Ayad entitled "A Four-Sided Hamas" explains how, "since its election, Hamas must juggle between armed conflict and compromise." The editorial is entitled "Small Steps." La Croix's Jean-Christophe Ploquin wonders how "Israel is going to react to the document, a demarche somewhere between the olive branch and the Kalashnikov." Le Figaro underscores the "intense pressure which the Israelis are putting on the Palestinians" to free the Franco-Israeli soldier. Its editorial is entitled: "Saving Private Shalit." Bernard Guetta on France Inter radio talks about "War and peace colliding in the Middle East." (See Part C)

Both Le Figaro and Liberation interview Abdel Madi, the French-fluent Shiite Iraqi Vice President who is visiting Paris. In Le Figaro: "The Iraqi government has launched a major offensive to restore security in Baghdad, and these executions are clearly a response to this offensive. The terrorists need to be on the front pages... These attacks are also a response to Zarkawi's assassination... It is premature to talk of a troop withdrawal. We must be realistic. We need to work on the conditions of such a withdrawal." In Liberation: "Iraq needs time. Lots of it. We started at the lowest possible point: three wars, an international embargo, sanctions, years of repression... Zarkawi's elimination will help to reduce the violence. His death means that the level of infiltration and intelligence has reached a high point..."

The French army's battle against the Taliban in Afghanistan is reported by embedded journalist Adrien Jaulmes in Le Figaro while in Liberation, a report says that "The Taliban Are Under Iraqi Influence." (See Part C)

With the title "The Madness of the Mightiest," Liberation reprints an op-ed by Noam Chomsky in translation, which appeared previously in the NYT and the IHT. Above the title Liberation comments: "The U.S. use the concept of 'just war' to justify illegitimate aggressions."

Les Echos interviews French Minister of Agriculture Dominique Bussereau about WTO negotiations this week. Bussereau says that although France's position has not changed since the October 28 meeting in Hong Kong, France is willing to make the sacrifices necessary for opening the EU's vast agriculture market. Defending the EU's credibility in negotiations, Bussereau claims that Europe already imports the most agricultural products from developing countries, particularly from Africa: "Europe must not accept being the sole financier of the Doha round." Bussereau expresses doubt, however, about U.S. acceptance of European terms, citing the Congress's resistance to lowering agricultural subsidies. "This project is unacceptable as is. But France is disposed to work to make changes in a realistic sense."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Middle East - Hamas - Kidnapped Soldier

"Small Steps"

Pierre Haski in left-of-center Liberation (06/28): "At times, it is when the worst is expected that progress is made. The kidnapping of Gilad Shalit looked like a test, threatening to trigger a new wave of violence in Gaza and a new confrontation between Hamas and Abbas. It is at this point that the historic announcement was made... It would be easy to ignore the draft document ... because it does not refer to Israel's existence explicitly and has not led to the liberation of Sergeant Shalit. But the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is made up of such small steps, which

can appear at first as irrelevant... If this agreement can dispel the threat of a civil war and change mentalities, it will not have been useless. A glimmer hope at a very dark time."

"Saving Private Shalit"

Pierre Rousselin in right-of-center Le Figaro (06/28): "The draft agreement makes the liberation of Sergeant Shalit even more urgent... Beyond the fate of Gilad Shalit, and the danger of reprisal, what is really at stake here is whether the Hamas politicians are able to impose their views on the radical faction. The kidnapping of Shalit was an attempt to sabotage the plans for a national entente. It is good that Ismail Haniyeh ignored the blackmail attempt of the kidnappers and went ahead with the signature. It is a start. One hopes the PM will have the means to impose his authority definitively... But is Fatah playing a double game? Everything must be done to resolve the crisis, including saving private Shalit."

"On the Edge"

Jean-Christophe Ploquin in Catholic La Croix (06/28): "The 'national entente' draft document announced yesterday appears to be born out of desperation... The urgency is not so much the risk of an Israeli incursion to save the kidnapped soldier, but stopping a Palestinian civil war... It remains to be seen how Israel is going to react to the Palestinian demarche which stands somewhere between an olive branch and a Kalashnikov."

"A Crazy Day in the Middle East"

Bernard Guetta on government-run France Inter radio (06/28): "War and peace are colliding in the Middle East. The question, which cannot be answered yet, is which will prevail? Hamas has de facto recognized the existence of two states along the 1967 borders... For the first time in the history of this long conflict, Hamas and Fatah are converging towards a compromise... This, in short, is a revolution. To get to this point, the U.S. and Europe were forced to suspend their aid... and Mahmoud Abbas had to threaten calling for a referendum... The skeptics will call and are calling the agreement a 'tactical move' and 'a smokescreen.' But this is policy: the Islamists are adhering to reality. This is a window of opportunity for peace and, in terms of the future, this is what counts."

"A Four-Sided Hamas"

Christophe Ayad in left-of-center Liberation (06/28): "Yesterday stands practically as the caricature of the dilemma facing Hamas. An armed movement on the one hand, Hamas draws much of its credibility from its ability to strike blows on Israel, like the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit. Since its election, Hamas is also part of a government, which needs to take into account its population's aspirations to live in peace. It is with this in mind, and in order to avoid a civil war, that the Prime Minister signed the draft document on a national entente... By implicitly recognizing Israel, Hamas is fulfilling one of the three conditions set by the Quartet to resume contact and aid. But Washington was reserved yesterday when it learned of the entente, reminding Hamas it needed to also give up violence and recognize former agreements."

Afghanistan

"The Taliban Under Iraqi Influence"

Jean-Pierre Perrin in left-of-center Liberation (06/28): "Even in the darkest hours of the Afghan war against the Red Army, suicide attacks were never used by the Taliban... Today, not only are suicide attacks being perpetrated, they are becoming everyday occurrences. This leads a Pakistani journalist to comment that 'a relationship has been established between the Iraqi and Afghan insurgents.' In fact, the Taliban who have returned en force are not the same who reigned previously... Today's Taliban are more radical: they kill their opponents without making demands. This radicalization seems to have been imported from Iraq. Today's Taliban are better trained to the use of modern explosives."

STAPLETON